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**Families Matter to All of Us**

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Nebraska is fundamentally changing how it serves children and families in the child welfare and juvenile services system through an initiative called *Families Matter*.

Why? Our state has historically ranked among the worst in the nation, with high numbers of children in state custody and too many children removed from their homes and served away from their families.

The need to make significant changes became more evident over time:

- For years, families, foster families, legislators and advocacy groups have called for changes in how services are provided.
- In the first federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in 2002, Nebraska met only two of the six CFSR data measures. The 2008 CFSR was based on slightly different data measures and Nebraska, like all other states, did not do as well and met only one of the six data measures.

*Families Matter* is about supporting Nebraska families and keeping kids safe. We know children grow best in their own homes, they should be reunified or moved to permanency through adoption or guardianship in a timely manner, and families should get services earlier and be offered services after they leave the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

To make this happen, we're partnering with KVC Behavioral HealthCare Nebraska, Inc. in the southeast Nebraska area including Lincoln, and with both KVC and Nebraska Families Collaborative in Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

While this change is a process that will take several years, we're seeing successes. For example, in April 2006, state wards were at an all-time high of 7,803. Through our efforts and those of our partners over the past several years, that number is down to about 6,220 today. We're focusing on keeping kids in their own homes with services rather than removing them.

*Families Matter* to all of us. Find out more by going to [www.dhhs.ne.gov](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov) and searching for *Families Matter*.